

## A's News Clips, Wednesday, March 23, 2011

### Oakland A's, Hideki Matsui not panicking over his sluggish spring

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- The A's signed Hideki Matsui to stir life into their dormant offense.

But with the April 1 opener fast approaching, their marquee offseason addition has struggled to say the least.

Matsui is hitting .143 in 15 Cactus League games with one home run and two RBIs, and the homer accounts for his only extra base-hit in 42 at-bats.

Is this simply the sign of a veteran slow to round into form or a cause for concern?

Nobody in an Oakland uniform -- manager Bob Geren, hitting coach Gerald Perry or Matsui himself -- is sounding alarms.

But Matsui, 36, was signed to a one-year, \$4.25 million deal in December to provide power in the middle of the lineup. Though Matsui isn't the only player who has struggled in Cactus League games, the A's offensive fortunes are tied greatly to their new designated hitter.

"The second half of the spring, he's hit the ball pretty hard," Geren said. "He's got 42 at-bats, and his last 20 or so have been real good."

After a 1-for-21 start, Matsui has taken a slight turn for the better, going 5 for 21 with four walks over his past seven games.

One major league scout who has followed the A's this spring said he doesn't put much stock in Matsui's exhibition numbers.

"You're not going to see the real guy until the regular season," said the scout, who requested anonymity.

Matsui has had company, as two other newly acquired hitters have struggled.

David DeJesus, the A's No. 3 hitter, is batting .216 and has just a single RBI in 13 games. Cleanup man Josh Willingham is batting .194 with 13 strikeouts over his previous 13 games, though he had two hits and an RBI in Tuesday's 10-8 victory over the Cincinnati Reds.

But Matsui -- a .290 hitter who's averaged 20 homers and 85 RBIs over eight major league seasons -- has the potential to make the biggest impact.

"There's no panic or anything like that," Perry said. "The approach and the whole nine yards, I think it's like night and day from earlier. He's seeing a lot of pitches, and that's something you want to do in spring training. So I'm pleased actually."

Matsui didn't play Tuesday because of a stiff neck, but Geren was hopeful of having him back Wednesday.

Matsui said he judges his springs less on numbers and more on how well they prepare him for the regular season.

"Obviously the batting average is not very good," he said. "But as far as readiness for the season, I feel pretty good. I think it's how my swing feels, how that's coming along, and then my timing."

But he's generally performed better during spring training.

Last year with the Los Angeles Angels, Matsui hit .261 with one homer and nine RBIs in exhibitions. He went on to hit .274 with 21 homers and 84 RBIs during the regular season.

With the New York Yankees in 2009, Matsui hit just .229 in the spring but had four homers and 14 RBIs. That led to a season in which he hit .274 with 28 homers and 90 RBIs.

Time will tell whether his current struggles have any bearing on the regular season.

Perry said Matsui, with a combined 18 professional seasons split between the major leagues and Japan, knows what it takes to get himself in gear.

"You try to give him his space and let him work the way he's been working to get ready for the season, because he knows what he needs to do."

## **A's notebook: Bullpen gets healthy boost with Craig Breslow's spring debut**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- With closer Andrew Bailey doubtful for the start of the regular season, the A's did get another reliever back Tuesday.

Left-hander Craig Breslow made his exhibition debut with one not-so-clean inning as the A's beat the Cincinnati Reds 10-8. Breslow allowed three hits and two runs (one earned), but some defensive adventures behind him extended his inning.

A's manager Bob Geren was happy that Breslow came out of it healthy after a tender arm, and more recently a hamstring injury, had kept him on the shelf.

Geren said he expects Breslow, who made a team-leading 75 appearances in 2010, to be ready for the April 1 opener against Seattle.

"I don't see any problem being ready for opening day," Breslow said. "I think I addressed health, and now I can just work on getting guys out."

Geren said he had no indication when Bailey, out with a forearm strain, would resume throwing. With April 1 fast opener approaching, Bailey, a two-time All-Star, seems destined to start the season on the disabled list.

Bailey will participate in Wednesday's Celebrity Bartending Night at Scottsdale's American Junkie Restaurant. It will benefit Breslow's Strike 3 Foundation, which generates funds for childhood cancer research. Giants outfielder Cody Ross and Reds pitcher Dontrelle Willis also will serve as bartenders.

Brett Anderson earned praise from Geren after his six-inning start against the Reds, doing nothing to dispel the notion that he'll take the ball opening night.

Anderson allowed four runs but struck out four and walked none. He allowed a homer and double to reigning National League MVP Joey Votto.

"Joey Votto is the best hitter of all time," Anderson said.

He also allowed a homer to Jonny Gomes on an inside fastball for the second time this spring. Anderson was asked if he knows Gomes.

"No, but his bat knows my ball pretty good."

Center fielder Coco Crisp homered deep to center, scored twice and stole a base in his return from a left hamstring strain. Daric Barton went the opposite way to left field for a homer and also doubled, as the A's pounded Reds starter Mike Leake for seven earned runs.

The A's have a couple of off days early in the season, but Geren said he's inclined to not skip his fifth starter and instead give an extra day of rest to all of his starters.

Geren also said he'll announce his opening night starter by the end of this week, as well as his other two starters for the opening series against the Mariners.

## **Chin Music: Coco Crisp returns, Hideki Matsui sitting today with neck stiffness**

By Joe Stiglich, Oakland Tribune, 3/22/2011 10:37AM

We've got much better weather today, so the A's-Reds game is definitely on, with Brett Anderson getting the start.

–Coco Crisp is back in the lineup and said his sore left hamstring is better. But designated hitter Hideki Matsui will not make the trip to Goodyear because of a stiff neck he got from sleeping wrong a couple of nights ago. He did not hit Monday and said he might return Wednesday, depending on how his hitting goes today. He didn't expect his neck to factor into whether he plays in the outfield Thursday, when the A's play the Arizona Diamondbacks and won't have a DH. Manager Bob Geren said he's anticipating Matsui being his DH on Wednesday and playing the outfield Thursday.

–Geren reiterated that he'll probably announce his Opening Day starter by the end of the week, as well as the other starters for that first three-game series against Seattle. He also says he's inclined to NOT skip his fifth starter early in the season because of off days. He likes the idea of all the starters getting an extra day of rest.

The lineup vs. the Reds

Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Sweeney DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouzmanoff 3B, Pennington SS, Anderson LHP

## **Craig Breslow is tested in his 1st spring inning**

Susan Slusser, Chronicle Staff Writer

, Ariz. - **Craig Breslow** didn't have the easiest outing in his spring debut Tuesday, throwing 27 pitches in his one inning and testing his left hamstring by covering first in a 10-8 win over the Reds.

The reliever said everything checked out, the hamstring wasn't an issue, and he and manager **Bob Geren** agreed that Breslow will be ready to start the season a week from Friday.

"I don't see any problem," Breslow said.

Breslow allowed three hits and two runs, one earned, and got help from center fielder **Matt Carson**, who raced to the warning track for a long drive by **Ryan Hanigan**.

"I was pretty sure it was gone," Breslow said. "I didn't think he had a play on it. I was looking at the umpire for another ball."

**Chris Carter's** misplay in left later in the inning added to Breslow's pitch count, and **Conor Jackson's** feed over Breslow's head as he covered first added a degree of difficulty for a player who missed several weeks with a leg injury. But all was well, and now all the projected mainstays of the bullpen are back in action except closer **Andrew Bailey**. Even if Bailey (forearm strain) starts the season on the disabled list, as appears likely, the team has a strong bullpen.

"Obviously, with our depth, we all feel pretty comfortable," Breslow said.

**Matsui out of action:** **Hideki Matsui** was held out because of neck stiffness, which he initially felt when he woke up Monday. Matsui said he was already feeling much better, and Geren said Matsui will be the designated hitter today against the Cubs and play the outfield Thursday against Arizona.

Matsui is batting .143, but he said through translator **Roger Kahlon** that he feels he'll be ready for the season, judging by how his swing feels and his timing at the plate.

**Talking multi-years:** It's no secret that the A's consider All-Star **Trevor Cahill** among the next in line for a contract extension, even engaging in some talks last year. And it's a good bet that Cahill, 23, will be signed at least through his arbitration years (through 2014) soon.

There's another candidate for a multi-year extension who might beat Cahill to the punch, however: First baseman **Daric Barton**, who like Cahill would be arbitration-eligible after the season, is a strong possibility to be signed through at least 2014, according to a source. The A's value his ability to get on base, his defensive ability at first base and his durability; Barton, 25, played in 159 games last season.

The last position player the A's signed to a long-term deal was catcher **Kurt Suzuki**, who was signed through his arbitration years in July, getting a four-year deal worth \$16.25 million that includes a vesting option for 2014 that could take the value of the contract over \$25 million.

## **Cactus League recap**

**Score:** A's 10, Reds 8

**Notable:** Coco Crisp, who had been out since leaving Friday's game with hamstring tightness, homered, singled and stole a base. ... Daric Barton homered, doubled and drove in two runs. ... Brett Anderson, who is lined up to start Opening Night (though no announcement has been made), allowed six hits and four runs and struck out four.

**Quotable:** "I need to get it in my head I can't get an inside fastball by Jonny Gomes. Ego got involved and now, 2-0 Jonny Gomes."

*- A's starter Brett Anderson, echoing his Quotable from the start of the month, when he also gave up a homer to Petaluma's Gomes.*

**Today's game:** A's (Gio Gonzalez) vs. Cubs (Carlos Silva), 1:05 p.m.

## **Jemile Weeks gets 3 hits off Jonathan Sanchez**

Henry Schulman, Chronicle Staff Writer

A's second-base prospect **Jemile Weeks** might not have millions in the bank and a long major-league resume like his older brother, but he does have three hits against Giants starter **Jonathan Sanchez**. Brewers shortstop **Rickie Weeks** can boast only two, in 11 big-league plate appearances.

Jemile singled, doubled and homered against Sanchez in a Triple-A game at the Giants' minor-league complex Tuesday. Though the major-league team was off, Sanchez needed a start to stay in line for his April 1 season debut at Dodger Stadium.

Sanchez threw about 85 pitches and allowed five runs (four earned) in four innings. He walked one and struck out six, including four of five hitters in one stretch.

Sanchez did not care that he got hit, saying he used the start to refine his changeup, which he wants to throw in any count, especially on the first pitch to get ahead 0-1.

"I felt pretty good," he said. "I was getting everything over the plate. I threw a lot of changeups today, getting a feel for it. I got stretched out today. That's what I wanted to do."

Hitters are hard to walk in minor-league games because they are aggressive (even those drafted by **Billy Beane**). Still, Sanchez's good strikeout-to-walk ratio is a positive sign. In four Cactus League starts, he has 14 strikeouts and four walks, a trend that could keep him in games longer if he carries it into the season.

**Give and take:** Third-baseman **Conor Gillaspie**, one of the most improved Giants prospects this spring over last, homered in the Triple-A game against Oakland pitcher **Travis Banwart**. The main field at the complex features a chain-link replica of the wall in right field at AT&T Park. Gillaspie cleared it at the spot where the fence angles inward.

On the flip side, Gillaspie threw a ball into right field attempting to start a double play, extending a three-run inning that inflated Sanchez's pitch count.

**Briefly:** **Mark DeRosa**, out since Thursday with tendinitis in his surgically repaired wrist, is supposed to play today when the Giants visit the Angels. ... Reliever **Vinnie Chulk**, who pitched for the Giants from 2006-08 and signed a minor-league deal with Oakland this year, was in uniform for Tuesday's Triple-A game.

## **Drumbeat: Matsui gets an extra day off for neck stiffness**

From Chronicle Staff Writer Susan Slusser at Phoenix Muni 3/22/2011, 10:05AM

Hideki Matsui woke up yesterday with some neck stiffness and the A's are giving him another day off today, though he said through translator Roger Kahlon that he feels much better today.

I asked Matsui if the neck issue might keep him from playing in the outfield on Thursday, and he said that it will not; then manager Bob Geren told us that Matsui will DH tomorrow and play some in the outfield on Thursday.

Matsui's not hitting great so far, but you could say that about the bulk of the A's, including the other new additions, David DeJesus and Josh Willingham. No one's concerned about it, because spring numbers rarely correlate with regular-season performance. Many veterans, especially, are working on getting their swing honed, seeing the ball well, etc., and in Matsui's case, he hasn't gotten much to hit, especially early on. He said he feels good and he will be ready for the season; he likes the way his swing is coming around.

"Everyone starts at .000 on April 1," Geren said.

Joey Devine will throw an inning in minor-league camp tomorrow; he worked in a minor-league intrasquad game yesterday and he believes it will be the same scenario tomorrow. Rich Harden continues to do long toss, and while Andrew Bailey feels a little better every day, according to Geren, he is still not to the point of beginning to throw again.

Considering that it has been more than a week since Bailey has thrown, I can't imagine there's any way he'd start the season on the roster. He's not a player the A's are going to take any risks with, and under the new training staff, it seems as if great care will be taken with everyone, period - it's sort of a proactive caution, if that's possible. Translation: He won't be rushed. I'd be surprised if Bailey is back on the mound for the A's before mid-April at the earliest, and I'd bet it's more like late April to be on the safe side.

Here's today's lineup vs. the Reds in Goodyear: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Sweeney DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouz 3B, Pennington SS. Brett Anderson is starting and going on six days' rest.

## **Breslow makes up for lost time in spring debut**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- Lefty Craig Breslow unintentionally made up for lost time on Tuesday when he tallied nearly 30 pitches in his spring debut against the Reds.

"I threw more pitches than I think anyone wanted me to," Breslow said.

The A's southpaw is no stranger to extra work, having tallied a career-high 74 2/3 innings in 2010. So it was no surprise Breslow came out of his first Cactus League outing feeling just fine -- even after a lengthy encounter with leadoff man Ryan Hanigan to start the seventh.

"He looked good," manager Bob Geren said. "He made his pitches, hit his spots, showed some battle. He had a 3-2 count there, and he just kept throwing strike after strike. He made sure he put it in play."

Hanigan ultimately lined a long fly ball off Breslow near the left-center-field warning track, where center fielder Matt Carson caught what the lefty assuredly thought was out of the ballpark, to put away the first out.

Breslow, who had been nursing a strained hamstring for more than a week, completed the inning with three hits and two runs (one earned) attached to his name, and he was also forced to attempt a play at first base, on which the hamstring proved of no worry.

"I didn't feel restricted at all," Breslow said. "My stuff felt surprisingly good."

The 30-year-old is coming off the strongest season of his career, one which included a team-leading 75 appearances -- a number that ranked second among all American League relievers. He registered a 3.01 ERA and set an Oakland record for strikeouts by a left-handed reliever with 71.

Breslow has been brought along slowly following the busy 2010 campaign, but he said without hesitation Tuesday that he believes he'll be ready by season's start, thus putting him in line to join fellow lefty Brian Fuentes, along with right-handers Michael Wuertz, Brad Ziegler and Grant Balfour, in showcasing one of baseball's best bullpens this year -- even without closer Andrew Bailey (strained forearm) to start the year.

"I addressed my health today," Breslow said, "and now it's just about getting guys out and starting to feel like I can throw any pitch in any count. Most of the guys have been working on things, but I need to get outs in a week, so that's what I have to focus on."

Breslow, though unsure of his schedule for the remainder of the week, will likely be handed at least three more outings before the A's host the Mariners on April 1 for Opening Night.

## **Barton, Crisp homer as A's outslug Reds**

By Mark Sheldon / MLB.com

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- In a game that featured four home runs, the A's managed to outslug the Reds by a 10-8 score on Tuesday at Goodyear Ballpark.

Oakland took a 7-0 lead on Reds starter Mike Leake, who struggled to get through 2 1/3 innings while allowing six hits and four walks. Leake pitched behind a lot, which gave the A's plenty of opportunity to do damage.

The game's second batter, Daric Barton, got it going when he hit a 3-1 Leake pitch to left field for a solo homer. It was 2-0 in the third when the A's knocked Leake out with a five-run inning. Coco Crisp led off with a home run to center field and Kurt Suzuki later added a two-run double to the center-field wall.

The Reds answered back in the third inning against A's lefty Brett Anderson. With two outs, Brandon Phillips' rolling RBI single into left field scored Paul Janish. Joey Votto followed with a two-run home run into the left-field bullpen -- his third long ball of the spring.

In the fourth inning against Anderson, Jonny Gomes led off with a homer to the grassy hill behind the left-field 'pen.

Anderson pitched six innings and gave up four earned runs and six hits without a walk while striking out four.

Francisco Cordero worked his sixth straight scoreless inning of relief, but his streak of perfect innings ended at four. Cordero gave up two singles and a walk during the fifth inning, but also struck out the side.

Craig Breslow took over for Anderson in the bottom of the seventh and allowed three runs on two hits in his Cactus League debut.

Nick Masset pitched a perfect sixth inning in relief for Cincinnati. That was followed by a hitless inning for Aroldis Chapman, who walked one and struck out two.

Votto added his third hit of the game in the ninth inning. His two-run single shortened the A's lead to two runs before right-hander Michael Wuertz recorded the game's final out.

**Up next for A's:** Lefty Gio Gonzalez, working on an extra day of rest, is set to make his fifth spring start Wednesday when the A's travel to Mesa, Ariz., for a meeting with the Cubs at HoHoKam Park. Gonzalez has put together an exceptional string of outings thus far, evidenced by a 1.76 Cactus League ERA. He's allowed just three earned runs while striking out 19 in 15 1/3 innings. The game is scheduled for a 1:05 p.m. PT start.

**Up next for Reds:** It will be a key day in the battle for the final bullpen spots as Dontrelle Willis, Sam LeCure and Matt Maloney are all scheduled to get innings when the Reds head to Peoria to play the Padres at 4:05 p.m. ET. All three pitchers are coming off of lackluster outings but have an excellent chances to make the team. Homer Bailey, who is going to make the rotation, is the starting pitcher for Cincinnati.

## **Matsui sits out game with neck stiffness**

By Jane Lee / MLB.com

GOODYEAR, Ariz. -- Hideki Matsui was held out of the A's lineup on Tuesday because of a stiff neck, but the Japanese slugger believes he'll be ready for game action again on Wednesday, when he's slated to fulfill designated hitter duties against the host Cubs.

"It's much better than it was yesterday," Matsui said Tuesday morning through translator Roger Kahlon.

Matsui is scheduled to receive his first Cactus League start in the outfield on Thursday against the D-backs, who would not allow the A's to use a DH at Salt River Fields in Scottsdale, Ariz. Matsui said he isn't concerned about his neck altering those plans.

"We'll see how I feel," he said, "but I don't think it will affect that."

Matsui is hitting just .143 through 15 games and 42 at-bats, though no one's pushing the panic button just yet considering spring performances rarely correlate with regular-season numbers. More than anything, Matsui said he is simply focused on assessing pitches, as well as how his swing feels.

"Personally, I don't really pay much attention to numbers during spring," he said. "I know my batting average is not very good, but as far as readiness, I feel pretty good."

Matsui is coming off a 2010 campaign in which he hit .274 with 21 home runs and 84 RBIs with the Angels. In eight Major League seasons, he's compiled a .290 average, 161 home runs, 681 RBIs and an .848 OPS.

## **Major League: Breslow's charity to host bartending night**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/22/2011 5:03PM

Lefty Craig Breslow's Strike 3 Foundation, which provides funding for pediatric cancer research, will host "Celebrity Bartending Night" on Wednesday at American Junkie in Scottsdale, Ariz., in conjunction with real estate venture Issues Concerning Athletes. Players scheduled to make guest appearances behind the bar include Breslow, Andrew Bailey, Dallas Braden, Cameron Maybin, Cody Ross and Dontrelle Willis. The event will be held from 9-11 p.m., and American Junkie will be donating 10 percent of all bar revenue, as well as 20 percent of all pre-booked tables, to Strike 3 Foundation.

Additionally, VIP tickets -- which includes access to celebrities -- will be available for purchase at the door for \$50 per person.

For booking information, you can contact Erica Brooks at ICABaseball@aol.com

## **Major League: Matsui out of lineup; Breslow makes debut**

Jane Lee, mlb.com, 3/22/2011 10:34am

go again tomorrow. He's slated to play in the outfield for a few innings in Thursday's game against the D-Backs -- they wouldn't allow the A's to carry a DH -- and he said he's not concerned about his neck affecting those plans.

Matsui's spring numbers aren't great -- he's hitting just .143 -- but it's important to remember that Cactus League performances rarely carry over into the regular season. He noted through his translator this morning that he never pays much attention to his numbers around this time of the year. Rather, he focuses on how his swing feels and his timing -- both of which he said are coming along. "As far as readiness," he said, "I feel pretty good."

The Japanese slugger isn't the only one without a healthy dose of hits this spring. Conor Jackson (.156) and David DeJesus (.200) haven't produced much, and Josh Willingham (.220) and Mark Ellis (.225) aren't too far behind. I don't think anyone's worried at this point, though, because it's really about regaining that comfort level at the plate and studying pitches.

Joey Devine will throw in a Minor League game today after pitching in a simulated game on Monday. As I mentioned in **this story**, he said he still feels like he has a lot of work to do before being ready to throw in a big league game. Much of that comes with just wanting to feel good for consecutive outings -- physically and mechanically. It's unlikely he'll start the year with the team, but the fact that he's healthy is a positive sign.

In other bullpen news, Craig Breslow is scheduled to make his spring debut today. He'll likely get one inning of work in against the Reds.

Here's who will start the game: Crisp CF, Barton 1B, DeJesus RF, Willingham LF, Sweeney DH, Suzuki C, Ellis 2B, Kouz 3B, Pennington SS, Anderson P

## **A's hit Reds' Leake hard in 10-8 win**

By ASSOCIATED PRESS

GOODYEAR, Ariz. — Coco Crisp and Daric Barton homered off Mike Leake, lifting the Oakland Athletics over the Cincinnati Reds 10-8 on Tuesday.

Leake allowed seven runs in his worst spring outing. He also gave up two doubles among six Oakland hits in 2 1-3 innings.

Leake made the Reds' rotation by default when an MRI exam revealed inflammation in Johnny Cueto's right shoulder.

"I felt a little too good today," Leake said. "I was just missing a little bit. I don't like to walk people. I was trying a little too hard."

Leake made the jump from college baseball to the major leagues last year without pitching in the minors, but was competing with Homer Bailey and Travis Wood for two open spots in the rotation this season. Cueto's injury cleared his way, but Leake doesn't feel settled.

"There's still going to be a decision when he comes back. When the season starts I still have to compete," Leake said.



Brett Anderson, in line to be Oakland's opening-night starter, gave up four runs and four hits in six innings. NL MVP Joey Votto and Jonny Gomes homered for the Reds.

Anderson was scheduled to start Monday, but rain forced cancellation of his outing against the Dodgers.

"I felt good," Anderson said after his longest stint of the spring. "Joey Vott is the best hitter of all-time and I have to get it through my head that I can't beat Jonny Gomes with fastballs inside. I felt good it's the best lineup I've faced yet and to go through it three times felt good."

Oakland manager Bob Geren is still open-minded about who will be on the mound against Seattle on April 1.

"I'm leaving everything open right now," Geren said. "I'll see how everyone comes through the next start."

Votto also doubled and singled and drove in four runs.

"It's about that time. You have to have some of your big boys swinging well at the end of spring and the beginning of the season, especially (Jay) Bruce, Votto and (Brandon) Phillips. Our starting guys are swinging good. Jonny Gomes is starting to swing a little better," Cincinnati manager Dusty Baker said.

Votto, a notoriously slow starter, increased his spring average to .324 with three home runs and a team-high 13 RBIs.

Barton, Kurt Suzuki and Mark Ellis added doubles for the A's. Barton has nine hits in his last 22 at-bats.

NOTES: Oakland reliever Craig Breslow made his first Cactus League appearance. He had a strained left hamstring that had restricted him to minor league games. ... Reds closer Francisco Cordero has six straight scoreless appearances. ... Cincinnati's projected starting lineup played all nine innings with the exception of Phillips, who played five. ... Drew Stubbs struck out four times against Oakland. "Stubby's struggling a bit," Baker said. "We're going to DH him in some minor league games to get him extra at-bats."

## **A's Geren remains quiet on starting rotation**

Mychael Urban, CSNBayArea.com

PHOENIX — Many big-league managers like to reward the starting pitcher who performed the best the previous season with the honor of starting on Opening Day.

That's assuming said pitcher is healthy and performing fairly well the following spring, of course, and in this case that pitcher is right-hander Trevor Cahill, who represented the A's in the 2010 All-Star game, won 18 games and is healthy as Oakland winds down the Arizona portion of its exhibition season.

Geren on Tuesday, however, remained mum on his plans for the starting rotation, telling reporters at Phoenix Municipal Stadium that he probably won't make an announcement until this weekend.

"You do want to reward a guy," he said, "but that's not all that goes into it."

The sensational spring enjoyed by lefty Gio Gonzalez might go into it, too. He's viewed as the other strong possibility for that first assignment of the regular season, with lefties Brett Anderson and Dallas Braden likely to follow the first two starters, though perhaps not in that order.

As for the No. 5 spot in the rotation, which seems to have been secured by righty Brandon McCarthy, who pitched into the eighth inning against the Giants his last time out, Geren wouldn't say if he'll make that announcement when he names the Opening Day starter.

"I'll probably lay out at least the first few guys," said the skipper.

Bobby Cramer and Tyson Ross also are in the mix for the final rotation spots, and given the health-related inactivity this spring of relievers Andrew Bailey, Craig Breslow and Michael Wuertz, it's possible that the two No. 5 candidates who don't win the competition will be asked to work out of the bullpen early in the regular season while the aforementioned trio builds up the strength required to return.

## **A's ready to compete in 2011 if luck shines on them**

Sam McPherson, examiner.com, 3/22/2011

The 2010 San Francisco Giants proved it's better to be lucky than good when it comes to winning the World Series.

Heck, the laughable Florida Marlins proved that twice, in both 1997 and 2003.

Oh sure, you really need to be both, but the luck factor certainly weighs much more heavily as you get into August, September and October.

Consider the fact the Giants were six games out of first place on August 28 last year, won their division only because the San Diego Padres experienced the longest losing streak (10 games) by a first-place team since 1932, didn't have to face the New York Yankees or the Tampa Bay Rays in the World Series, got miracle hitting out of a mediocre (at best) offense, etc.

The Giants surely had their share of bad luck in 2002, of course, so the uncontrollable factors all even out in the long run.

And since the Oakland Athletics experienced a run of bad playoff fortune in the early-to-mid 2000s and many injury woes in the years since, that means perhaps the tide will turn for the A's in 2011 -- just like it did for the Giants in 2010.

What Oakland needs in 2011 is their pitching staff to repeat its 2010 performance, if not get even better at the back end of the rotation and the bullpen. With Brandon McCarthy probably snagging the No. 5 slot in the rotation with a strong spring (20.2 innings, with zero walks, 14 strikeouts and a 3.05 ERA) and Rich Harden still in reserve -- not to mention the bullpen signings of Brian Fuentes and Grant Balfour -- both those needs may have been addressed.

The A's also need a revamped offense to produce, which means new acquisitions Hideki Matsui, David DeJesus and Josh Willingham need to jump-start one of the worst offenses in the league last year -- and returning players like Coco Crisp and Kevin Kouzmanoff need to improve from their 2010 efforts for Oakland.

In the end, the A's need to stay healthy and they need to score runs. That will determine how "lucky" they get in 2011.

Easy as pie. Piece of cake.

Just ask the Giants.

## **A talent that can't be faked**

Buster Olney, espn.com insider, 3/22/2011

Gio Gonzalez is "the fakest Latin guy on the planet," teammate Dallas Braden jokes, because Gonzalez doesn't seem to like Latin food. But sometimes Braden will take him to get Mexican food, or Cuban fare, and the two will talk baseball. Pitch selection, game situations, pre-start preparation, pitch grips; everything is on the table.

This isn't always the case when baseball professionals get together. The Phillies' starting pitchers say they almost never talk baseball. "That's because they've figured it out," said Braden, respectfully. "And we're still trying to figure it out."

But in the eyes of teammates, like Braden, Gonzalez is close to climbing to that elite level of pitchers, after his strong second half last season, and after he started to ask a lot of questions and absorb the answers. "His mental capacity has really grown," said Braden. "He's ready to Nuke LaLoosh them, and announce his presence with authority."

After Gonzalez rejoined the Athletics after a stint in the minors in 2009, he approached Braden. "Please help me stay here," Gonzalez said. "I don't want to be sent down."

From Braden's perspective, the timing of the earnest plea was a heck of a coincidence, because Braden had intended to approach Gonzalez -- at the request of others in the organization -- and really push him. Instead, Gonzalez had become a willing student, talking with Braden about his mental approach, about how he limited damage within innings.

In the past, Braden would watch Gonzalez throw in a start and would see how a ball one first-pitch to a hitter would slowly but relentlessly snowball on him. A walk, a hit, then a big hit. Gonzalez spoke to Braden about focusing pitch to pitch, about pitching to contact down in the strike zone in an effort to get a ground ball.

The lessons began to take hold within Gonzalez, particularly in the second half of last year when he posted a 2.59 ERA in 15 starts, with an 8-3 record. In Gonzalez's first appearance this spring, he came out blazing. "A 95 mph fastball, and an 82 mph hammer," Braden raved, referencing Gonzalez's great curveball. "Who comes out and throws like that?"

Gonzalez has been diligently learning how to use a changeup, a pitch that could be very effective against right-handed hitters, and Braden has seen progress. Gonzalez is probably the least-known among Oakland's front four starters, because Brett Anderson had a strong 2009, Braden threw a perfect game last year, and Trevor Cahill was so good in 2010.

"But you know what?" Braden said. "We all know that Gio has the chance to be the best [of the starters]."

Gonzalez is teased by teammates for the shape of his body -- the strong legs and backside. "His hourglass figure," Braden said, laughing.

But Braden watches Gonzalez pitch and does not hesitate in drawing a comparison with another left-hander who had some success. "Steve Carlton," said Braden. "You talk about an unhittable breaking ball, and the ability to run a fastball up there in the mid-90s," said Braden. "He's got that kind of stuff."

None of it could have manifested, though, if Gonzalez hadn't opened his mind and listened to the advice that others had for him.

Oakland's rainout on Monday might mean that Gonzalez won't get the ball on Opening Day, writes Susan Slusser; instead, Brett Anderson could be the Opening Day starter.

The Athletics haven't announced any decisions, but Brandon McCarthy is expected to be Oakland's No. 5 starter; he has pitched very effectively, not allowing a single walk in 20.2 innings, with 14 strikeouts and a 3.05 ERA.

## Notables

- The Giants are encouraged by how much progress closer Brian Wilson has made in his recovery from a strained oblique, writes Henry Schulman.
- The White Sox could be thinking about the end of April for Jake Peavy, writes Mark Gonzales. Phil Humber hopes to step into Peavy's spot in the rotation.
- Johnny Cueto will start the year on the DL, because of shoulder soreness. From John Fay's piece: "The rotation will be Edinson Volquez, Homer Bailey, Bronson Arroyo, Travis Wood and Mike Leake. Right now, it looks as if they'll go in that order since Arroyo had to scratch Monday's start with the flu."
- As good as Chris Davis has been this spring, hitting over .400, Mitch Moreland is not letting his chance to be the primary first baseman for Texas slip away, writes Jeff Wilson. Nolan Ryan *loves* how Moreland plays.
- Kyle Drabek had a great outing on Monday.
- The Yankees haven't announced any final decisions, but Ivan Nova is expected to be their No. 4 starter. They have other choices to make:

**A)** Should they keep Freddy Garcia in the rotation and use Bartolo Colon out of the bullpen, and trade Sergio Mitre? (Colon threw six strong innings at the Tampa Bay Rays on Monday).

**B)** Should they use Colon as the No. 5 starter, keep Mitre as the swingman and cut Garcia?

**C)** Should they keep Garcia and Mitre and cut Colon?

The guess here is that Garcia will get the No. 5 spot.

• Had a talk last night with Boston pitching coach Curt Young about Daisuke Matsuzaka, and Young mentioned how he thinks that Matsuzaka has become devoted to the idea of becoming more efficiently. "He knows that if his pitch count is high, then he's not going to be in the game for very long," said Young, who thinks that Matsuzaka has taken a more aggressive approach in the way he's attacked the strike zone in his recent outings.

### **Evaluator observations**

1. One evaluator loves the work he has seen out of Prince Fielder this spring, saying that Fielder is playing very hard and hustling.
2. A rival evaluator stationed in Arizona thinks that the worst team he has seen this spring is the Diamondbacks. "They just don't have a lot [of talent] over there," he said.

### **Moves, deals and decisions**

1. Luis Castillo is going to play for the Phillies over the next 10 days, and then they'll make a decision about whether to keep him.

From Matt Gelb's story, in reference to Chase Utley:

The deal underscores the continued concern about Utley, who has not displayed any discernible progress since leaving camp to meet with an undisclosed rehab specialist last week. Amaro said Utley's progress remains "status quo."

"We have been concerned," Amaro said. "We haven't made any bones about that."

2. The Mets cut Oliver Perez. They are now officially out of scapegoats, writes Filip Bondy.
3. The Pirates cut Garrett Atkins.
4. The Braves would still like to trade Kenshin Kawakami, writes Carroll Rogers.
5. The Tigers will skip Phil Coke in the rotation in the first turn, writes John Lowe.
6. Matt Carpenter was among the players cut by the Cardinals.
7. Luke Hochevar is lined up as the No. 1 starter for the Royals.
8. The Cubs will work through roster questions today, writes Gordon Wittenmyer.
9. The Cleveland Indians' rotation is almost set.

### **Dings and dents**

1. Bryce Harper sprained his ankle, but is OK. It speaks a lot to the interest in him that within an hour after he got hurt, the Internet was buzzing with questions/speculation about his condition.
2. Scott Olsen has a hamstring problem that will keep him out at the outset of the season.
3. Matt Joyce is dealing with some back tightness.
4. Jason Isringhausen has some elbow pain.
5. The Rockies are mapping out a schedule for Todd Helton in their effort to keep him healthy, writes Troy Renck.
6. Justin Upton is OK and ready to go. Within the same notebook, there is word that J.J. Putz has made progress as he recovers from back tightness.

7. The Royals aren't sure what will happen with Jason Kendall, who is recovering.
8. Joe Mauer and Delmon Young appear ready to go, writes Joe Christensen.
9. Michael Cuddyer will return to the Twins' lineup on Wednesday, writes Kelsie Smith.
10. Joel Pineiro says he's feeling better.
11. Looks like Casey Blake will start the year on the disabled list.

### **The Battle for Jobs**

1. Matt Dominguez has been stuck in a slump. It sounds like Florida's Plan B is to play Emilio Bonifacio at second and shift Omar Infante to third base.
2. An 11-year veteran of the minors is getting a chance to make the Marlins.
3. Scott Proctor had a good day, as he tries to win a job with the Braves.
4. Nelson Figueroa will be the No. 5 starter for the Astros, writes Zachary Levine.
5. Dan Connolly sifts through the Orioles' last roster decisions.
6. Barry Enright will be part of the Arizona rotation.
7. The Indians have spots in the bullpen available, writes Paul Hoynes.
8. Kyle Waldrop could win a job in the Twins' rotation.
9. Michael Pineda continues to help his case to be part of the Seattle rotation, writes Geoff Baker.

### **Monday's games**

1. The Cardinals and Nationals had a dustup that stemmed from a play involving Nyjer Morgan last summer. This was typical stuff for the Cardinals, says Adam LaRoche.
2. Jeremy Hellickson was The Man against the Yankees, over four innings.
3. Jon Lester pitched against Roy Halladay on Monday and had high praise for the right-hander.

Watched a lot of the Phillies-Boston game on Monday, and Halladay looks like he's already in midseason form -- great movement, great command, total dominance against hitters, who could not square up the ball. Jed Lowrie loved the challenge of hitting against him, writes Michael Silverman.

4. Mat Latos had a rough start for the Padres, but there was a good sign in the game, writes Bill Center -- Latos managed to keep his composure, which has been a problem.

### **Other stuff**

- Chad Cordero is trying to hold his life together after losing a baby to SIDS, writes Barry Svrluga.
- Miguel Tejada intends to play every day for the Giants, writes John Shea. Sounds like Bruce Bochy intends to bat him in the No. 8 spot, as Andrew Baggarly mentions here.
- Maicer Izturis hopes to stay healthy.
- Mike Stanton has a good approach at the plate, writes David Neal.

- The Marlins' new ballpark isn't finished, but already holds value.
- Marcus Thames and T.J. Simers spoke, sort of.
- The Rockies' success hinges on Carlos Gonzalez, writes Mark Kiszla.
- B.J. Upton is glad that the Rays had his back after some ugly comments from a fan.
- Curtis Granderson looks great, writes Kevin Kernan.
- Aroldis Chapman is a cover guy.
- Mike Ilitch skipped his traditional media session, writes Tom Gage.
- Chris Narveson is struggling for command.
- Jury selection began in the Barry Bonds trial. Most of the jury members said they are not sports fans, writes Juliet Macur.

Baseball is on trial, writes Gwen Knapp. The jury is lukewarm on baseball and BALCO, writes Howard Mintz.

The spectacle is under way, writes Mark Purdy.

- Mary Melberg has survived 106 years of being a Cubs fan, writes Rick Telander.

And today will be better than yesterday.

## **Pink Pony is back with much of the same ambiance**

By JANIE McCAULEY, AP, 3/22/2011

It used to be the spring training hot spot. Then, it was gone.

Back in the day, the Pink Pony attracted the likes of Dizzy Dean, Mickey Mantle, Billy Martin \_ Ted Williams and Willie Mays, too. Baseball executives, scouts and scores of fans would flock to the Pony for food and refreshment after a long day at the diamond.

This spring, the Pink Pony is open again \_ and not so different from before under new management.

Mickey Morabito recently returned to the Pony hoping its new owners had maintained the ambiance that has made this place such a special stop for regulars at spring training year after year.

The Oakland Athletics' traveling secretary gave it a big thumbs-up. So did longtime A's equipment manager Steve Vucinich.

Nearly as big a deal as San Francisco closer Brian Wilson's bushy black beard and as talked about as Arizona and Colorado's snazzy new training complex at Salt River Fields, the new Pink Pony is creating its own buzz this spring \_ in Arizona, anyway.

The restaurant has a decades-old following, frequented by the regulars who are mostly baseball folk. It's a Cactus League classic, a landmark in Old Town Scottsdale that is particularly popular in the month of March when a baseball-crazed clientele comes to town.

The Pony's doors reopened again Feb. 13 under new ownership after being closed for 1 1/2 years. The decor, with all the old pictures, those black booth seats and the familiar Pink Pony sign outside, is nearly the same. The steakhouse menu still features many of the old classic comfort foods like chicken pot pie and meatloaf, and the cuts of steak the Pony is so famous for \_ along with the staple sides of starches and salad, like the loaded baked potato.

One intriguing new addition: a grilled asparagus and fresh hearts of palm salad.

"People driving down the street do a double take, 'Oh, it's open again,'" said bartender Jason Bonner, part of the latest Pony regime. "I poked my head in and had a cocktail now and then. This is new to me as well."

Danny Little and Tim Smith are the new owners running the show.

"They did a nice job on it," said Morabito, in his 31st year with the A's. "They kept the bats and the caricatures. The food was good. The key thing was they kept the charm and the feel of the place. A lot of the Pony was the people, the bartenders."

Bob Murch stopped by the Pony bar for a couple of beers and fried calamari on a recent Tuesday for his first return visit since the reopening. The 64-year-old Murch, who works for a general contractor and lives in nearby Paradise Valley, has been a Pony regular for about 30 years. He wasn't sure the Pony would ever be back.

"I think it's worth bringing my wife back here," said Murch, who grew up a baseball fan in St. Louis.

Aside from some of the large collection of memorabilia that was auctioned off by the former owner, Gwen Briley, there haven't been significant changes. Much of the baseball stuff is still there \_ bats on the walls, photos, a black San Francisco Giants flag.

Briley's late husband, Charlie, had opened the Pony and it became a hot spot for everyone from the baseball brass, coaches, players and fans on their way to games or heading home from the ballpark.

It was Scottsdale's oldest restaurant before it closed in August 2009 after a 60-year run.

"You name it, they've been here," Murch said of the Pony's loyal fans, including a large contingent of Chicago Cubs. "I just wanted to check this out. There's absolutely no doubt when you walk in here it's the Pink Pony. There was not one square inch of this place not decorated with something that had to do with baseball. That's the tough part to replace."

Robert and Patty Camacho live about a mile away and had ridden their bikes by the Pony, noticing it was set to reopen. They stopped by for drinks shortly afterward.

"Anything to keep Old Town Scottsdale vibrant," Patty Camacho said. "It couldn't happen soon enough. The Giants winning the World Series is like a steroid in the arm here."

Vucinich, for one, was back at the Pony for cocktails the first day it reopened.

"Even though now it's not family owned but it's corporation owned, they've done a nice job," he said.